

## CLAIMS

### WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for detecting a defect in a material web having a first surface, a second surface, and a pore, said defect having a defect bubble point pressure different from a pore bubble point pressure of said pore, the method comprising:
  - filling said pore and said defect with a liquid;
  - applying a differential pressure across said material web so as to remove said liquid from one of said pore and said defect, said differential pressure being between said defect bubble point pressure and said pore bubble point pressure;
  - capturing an image of said material web after said differential pressure has been applied, and
  - identifying said defect based on said image.
2. The method according to claim 1, wherein applying said differential pressure across said material web includes applying a vacuum pressure to said first surface of said material web.
3. The method according to claim 2, wherein applying vacuum pressure includes placing said material web in contact with a vacuum roller.
4. The method according to claim 1, wherein applying said differential pressure across said material web includes applying a gaseous pressure to said first surface of said material web.
5. The method according to claim 1, wherein said defect bubble point pressure is lower than said pore bubble point pressure and said liquid is removed from said defect.
6. The method according to claim 1, further including placing a mark on said material web.

7. The method according to claim 6, wherein said mark is placed over said defect.
8. The method according to claim 6, wherein said mark is placed near an edge of said material web.
9. The method according to claim 1, wherein identifying said defect includes comparing said image to a known image.
10. The method according to claim 1, wherein identifying said defect includes characterizing said image as a plurality of pixels.
11. The method according to claim 1, wherein removing said liquid from said one of said pore and said defect changes the temperature of a portion of said material web and further wherein said image is a thermal image of said material web.
12. The method according to claim 11, wherein identifying said defect includes characterizing said image as a plurality of pixels and assigning each of said pixels a numerical value based on a portion of said image corresponding to said pixel.
13. The method according to claim 11, wherein said second surface of said material web is in contact with a gas, wherein said gas is of a different temperature than said liquid, and wherein removing said liquid from said one of said pore and said defect includes drawing said gas into said one of said pore and said defect.
14. The method according to claim 1, further including calculating a current location of said defect based on information related to the velocity of said material web.
15. The method according to claim 1, further including applying a second differential pressure across said material web and capturing a second image of said material web after said second differential pressure has been applied.

16. A method for detecting a defect in a continuous material web having a pore and a defect, said method comprising:

filling said pore and said defect with a liquid;

placing a portion of said continuous material web in contact with a differential pressure source;

applying vacuum pressure to said continuous material web to create a differential pressure across said portion of said continuous material web, said differential pressure being higher than the bubble point pressure for said defect and lower than the bubble point pressure for said pore;

capturing an image of said portion of said continuous material web after said differential pressure has been applied; and

identifying said defect based on said image.

17. A system for detecting a defect in a material web, said material web having a first surface, a second surface, and a pore, said defect having a defect bubble point pressure different than a pore bubble point pressure of said pore, said system comprising:

a differential pressure source in contact with said first surface of said material web configured to apply a differential pressure across said material web, said;

a liquid contained within said pore and said defect;

a camera configured to capture an image of a portion of said material web after said differential pressure has been applied across said material web; and

a processor configured to determine the location of said defect based on said image, wherein

said differential pressure is between said defect bubble point pressure and said pore bubble point pressure such that, when said differential pressure is applied across said material web, said liquid is removed from one of said pore and said defect.

18. The system according to claim 17, wherein said processor is configured to receive data related to said image and to identify a portion of said image corresponding to said defect based on said data.
19. The system according to claim 17, wherein said processor includes logic for determining a current location of said defect on said material web based on data related to a location within said image of a portion of said image showing said defect and data related to at least one of a speed and a direction of travel of said material web.
20. The system according to claim 19, further including a post-processing device configured to receive data related to the current location of said defect from said processor and further configured to mark the current location of said device on said material web.
21. The system according to claim 20, wherein said post-processing device is configured so that it may be moved into contact with the material web.
22. The system according to claim 17, wherein said camera captures a thermal image of said portion of said material web.
23. The system according to claim 22, wherein said camera is an infrared camera.
24. The system according to claim 22, wherein a gas of a different temperature than said liquid is drawn into said one of said pore and said defect and said drawing said gas into said one of said pore and said defect changes the temperature of a portion of said material web surrounding said one of said pore and said defect.

25. The system according to claim 17, wherein said camera captures a photographic image of said portion of said material web.

26. The system according to claim 25, wherein said photographic image is a color photographic image.

27. The system according to claim 17, further including a first roller.

28. The system according to claim 27, wherein said first roller is configured such that said portion of said material web is submerged in said liquid when said portion of said material web is in contact with said first roller.

29. The system according to claim 27, further including a second roller.

30. The system according to claim 29, wherein at least one of said first roller and said second roller is driven.

31. The system according to claim 17, wherein said differential pressure source is configured to apply a second differential pressure across said material web.

32. The system according to claim 31, wherein said camera is configured to capture a second image of said portion of said material web after said second differential pressure has been applied.

33. The system according to claim 17, wherein said differential pressure source is a vacuum roller having a vacuum pressure inlet, an interior vacuum chamber and a cylindrical element with an opening therethrough, and said system further including a vacuum pressure source connected to said vacuum pressure inlet.

34. The system according to claim 33, wherein said cylindrical element rotates through a rotational cycle, and said vacuum roller further includes a shield, said shield and said

inner surface of said cylindrical member being configured so to substantially enclose said interior vacuum chamber.

35. The system according to claim 33, wherein said cylindrical element has a plurality of openings therethrough.
36. The system according to claim 17, wherein said differential pressure source applies pressurized gas to said first surface of said material web.
37. The system according to claim 36, wherein said differential pressure source changes the temperature of said pressurized gas prior to applying it to said first surface of said material web.
38. The system according to claim 17, wherein a bubble of gas encased in said liquid is produced on one of said first surface and said second surface of said material web at a location corresponding to said defect when said differential pressure is applied across said material web.
39. The system according to claim 38, wherein said image includes an image of said bubble and said processor is configured to compare data related to an image of said bubble with data related to a known image of a bubble.
40. The system according to claim 17, further including a liquid bath containing said liquid, wherein a portion of said material web is submerged in said liquid bath such that said liquid enters said pore and said defect.
41. A system for detecting a defect in a material web, said material web having a first surface, a second surface, and a pore, said defect having a defect bubble point pressure different than a pore bubble point pressure of said pore, said system comprising:

a vacuum roller in contact with said first surface of said material web, said vacuum roller configured to apply a differential pressure across said material web; a liquid bath containing a liquid, wherein a portion of said material web is submerged in said liquid bath such that said liquid enters said pore and said defect; and a camera to capture a thermal image of a portion of said material web after said differential pressure has been applied across said material web; and a processor to determine the location of said defect based on said image, wherein said differential pressure is between said defect bubble point pressure and said pore bubble point pressure such that, when said differential pressure is applied across said material web, said liquid is removed from one of said pore and said defect, and the temperature of a portion of said material web proximate said defect changes when said liquid is removed from said defect.

42. A method for repairing a defect in a material web having a first surface, a second surface, and a pore, said defect having a defect bubble point pressure different from a pore bubble point pressure of said pore, the method comprising:

filling said pore and said defect with a liquid;  
applying a differential pressure across said material web so as to remove said liquid from one of said pore and said defect, said differential pressure being between said defect bubble point pressure and said pore bubble point pressure;

capturing an image of said material web after said differential pressure has been applied,

identifying said defect based on said image;  
calculating a current location of said defect;

transmitting data relating to said current location to a post-processing device; and causing a post-processing device to effect a repair at said current location of said defect.

43. The method according to claim 42, further including determining at least one of the size and the shape of said defect, and transmitting data related to said at least one of said size and said shape to said post-processing device.
44. The method according to claim 42, wherein causing said post-processing device to effect a repair includes causing said post-processing device to move into contact with said material web.
45. The method according to claim 42, wherein said post-processing device is an adhesive dispenser, and wherein causing said post-processing device to effect a repair includes causing said adhesive dispenser to dispense a bead of an adhesive to cover at least a portion of said defect.
46. The method according to claim 42, wherein causing said post-processing device to effect a repair includes causing said post-processing device to affix a piece of a material to said material web to cover said defect.
47. The method according to claim 42, wherein causing said post-processing device to effect a repair includes causing said post-processing device to heat a portion of said material web proximate to said defect.
48. A system for repairing a defect in a material web, said material web having a first surface, a second surface, and a pore, said defect having a defect bubble point pressure different than a pore bubble point pressure of said pore, said system comprising:

a differential pressure source in contact with said first surface of said material web, said differential pressure source configured to apply a differential pressure across said material web;

a liquid bath containing a liquid, wherein a portion of said material web is submerged in said liquid bath such that said liquid enters said pore and said defect; and

a camera to capture an image of a portion of said material web after said differential pressure has been applied across said material web; and

a processor to determine a location of said defect based on said image; and

a post-processing device to receive data related to the location of said defect and to effect a repair; wherein

said differential pressure is between said defect bubble point pressure and said pore bubble point pressure such that when said differential pressure is applied across said material web, said liquid is removed from one of said pore and said defect.

49. The method according to claim 48, wherein said processor is further configured to determine at least one of the size and the shape of said defect, and to transmit data related to said at least one of said size and said shape to said post-processing device.
50. The method according to claim 48, wherein said post-processing device is configured to move into contact with said material web when effecting a repair.
51. The method according to claim 48, wherein said post-processing device is an adhesive dispenser, configured to dispense a bead of an adhesive to cover at least a portion of said defect.
52. The method according to claim 48, wherein said post-processing is configured to affix a piece of a material to said material web to cover said defect.

53. The method according to claim 48, wherein said post-processing device is configured to heat a portion of said material web proximate to said defect.

54. A method for detecting a defect in a material web having a first surface and a second surface, said defect having a defect bubble point pressure, the method comprising:

- filling said defect with a liquid;
- applying a differential pressure across said material web so as to remove said liquid from said defect, said differential pressure exceeding said defect bubble point pressure;
- capturing an image of said material web after said differential pressure has been applied, and
- identifying said defect based on said image.

55. The method according to claim 54, wherein applying said differential pressure across said material web includes applying a vacuum pressure to said first surface of said material web.

56. The method according to claim 55, wherein applying vacuum pressure includes placing said material web in contact with a vacuum roller.

57. The method according to claim 54, wherein applying said differential pressure across said material web includes applying a gaseous pressure to said first surface of said material web.

58. The method according to claim 54, further including placing a mark on said material web.

59. The method according to claim 58, wherein said mark is placed over said defect.

60. The method according to claim 58, wherein said mark is placed near an edge of said material web.

61. The method according to claim 54, wherein identifying said defect includes comparing said image to a known image.

62. The method according to claim 54, wherein identifying said defect includes characterizing said image as a plurality of pixels.

63. The method according to claim 54, wherein removing said liquid from said one of said pore and said defect changes the temperature of a portion of said material web and further wherein said image is a thermal image of said material web.

64. The method according to claim 63, wherein identifying said defect includes characterizing said image as a plurality of pixels and assigning each of said pixels a numerical value based on a portion of said image corresponding to said pixel.

65. The method according to claim 63, wherein said second surface of said material web is in contact with a gas, wherein said gas is of a different temperature than said liquid, and wherein removing said liquid from said one of said pore and said defect includes drawing said gas into said one of said pore and said defect.

66. The method according to claim 54, further including calculating a current location of said defect based on information related to the velocity of said material web.

67. The method according to claim 54, further including applying a second differential pressure across said material web and capturing a second image of said material web after said second differential pressure has been applied.

68. The method according to claim 54, wherein the material web is one of a dense film, a non-woven mat and a porous membrane.

69. A system for detecting a defect in a material web, said material web having a first surface and a second surface, said defect having a defect bubble point pressure, said system comprising:

a differential pressure source in contact with said first surface of said material web configured to apply a differential pressure across said material web, said;

a liquid contained within said defect;

a camera configured to capture an image of a portion of said material web after said differential pressure has been applied across said material web; and

a processor configured to determine the location of said defect based on said image, wherein

said differential pressure exceeds said defect bubble point pressure such that, when said differential pressure is applied across said material web, said liquid is removed from said defect.

70. The system according to claim 69, wherein said processor is configured to receive data related to said image and to identify a portion of said image corresponding to said defect based on said data.

71. The system according to claim 69, wherein said processor includes logic for determining a current location of said defect on said material web based on data related to a location within said image of a portion of said image showing said defect and data related to at least one of a speed and a direction of travel of said material web.

72. The system according to claim 71, further including a post-processing device configured to receive data related to the current location of said defect from said processor and further configured to mark the current location of said device on said material web.

73. The system according to claim 72, wherein said post-processing device is configured so that it may be moved into contact with the material web.
74. The system according to claim 69, wherein said camera captures a thermal image of said portion of said material web.
75. The system according to claim 74, wherein said camera is an infrared camera.
76. The system according to claim 74, wherein a gas of a different temperature than said liquid is drawn into said one of said pore and said defect and said drawing said gas into said one of said pore and said defect changes the temperature of a portion of said material web surrounding said one of said pore and said defect.
77. The system according to claim 69, wherein said camera captures a photographic image of said portion of said material web.
78. The system according to claim 77, wherein said photographic image is a color photographic image.
79. The system according to claim 69, further including a first roller.
80. The system according to claim 79, wherein said first roller is configured such that said portion of said material web is submerged in said liquid when said portion of said material web is in contact with said first roller.
81. The system according to claim 79, further including a second roller.
82. The system according to claim 81, wherein at least one of said first roller and said second roller is driven.
83. The system according to claim 69, wherein said differential pressure source is configured to apply a second differential pressure across said material web.

84. The system according to claim 83, wherein said camera is configured to capture a second image of said portion of said material web after said second differential pressure has been applied.
85. The system according to claim 69, wherein said differential pressure source is a vacuum roller having a vacuum pressure inlet, an interior vacuum chamber and a cylindrical element with an opening therethrough, and said system further including a vacuum pressure source connected to said vacuum pressure inlet.
86. The system according to claim 85, wherein said cylindrical element rotates through a rotational cycle, and said vacuum roller further includes a shield, said shield and said inner surface of said cylindrical member being configured so to substantially enclose said interior vacuum chamber.
87. The system according to claim 85, wherein said cylindrical element has a plurality of openings therethrough.
88. The system according to claim 69, wherein said differential pressure source applies pressurized gas to said first surface of said material web.
89. The system according to claim 88, wherein said differential pressure source changes the temperature of said pressurized gas prior to applying it to said first surface of said material web.
90. The system according to claim 69, wherein a bubble of gas encased in said liquid is produced on one of said first surface and said second surface of said material web at a location corresponding to said defect when said differential pressure is applied across said material web.

91. The system according to claim 90, wherein said image includes an image of said bubble and said processor is configured to compare data related to an image of said bubble with data related to a known image of a bubble.

92. The system according to claim 69, further including a liquid bath containing said liquid, wherein a portion of said material web is submerged in said liquid bath such that said liquid enters said pore and said defect.

93. A method for repairing a defect in a material web having a first surface and a second surface, said defect having a defect bubble point pressure, the method comprising:  
filling said defect with a liquid;  
applying a differential pressure across said material web so as to remove said liquid from said defect, said differential pressure exceeding said defect bubble point pressure;  
capturing an image of said material web after said differential pressure has been applied,  
identifying said defect based on said image;  
calculating a current location of said defect;  
transmitting data relating to said current location to a post-processing device; and  
causing a post-processing device to effect a repair at said current location of said defect.

94. The method according to claim 93, further including determining at least one of the size and the shape of said defect, and transmitting data related to said at least one of said size and said shape to said post-processing device.

95. The method according to claim 93, wherein causing said post-processing device to effect a repair includes causing said post-processing device to move into contact with said material web.
96. The method according to claim 93, wherein said post-processing device is an adhesive dispenser, and wherein causing said post-processing device to effect a repair includes causing said adhesive dispenser to dispense a bead of an adhesive to cover at least a portion of said defect.
97. The method according to claim 93, wherein causing said post-processing device to effect a repair includes causing said post-processing device to affix a piece of a material to said material web to cover said defect.
98. The method according to claim 93, wherein causing said post-processing device to effect a repair includes causing said post-processing device to heat a portion of said material web proximate to said defect.
99. A system for repairing a defect in a material web, said material web having a first surface and a second surface, said defect having a defect bubble point pressure, said system comprising:
  - a differential pressure source in contact with said first surface of said material web, said differential pressure source configured to apply a differential pressure across said material web;
  - a liquid bath containing a liquid, wherein a portion of said material web is submerged in said liquid bath such that said liquid enters said defect; and
  - a camera to capture an image of a portion of said material web after said differential pressure has been applied across said material web; and

a processor to determine a location of said defect based on said image; and  
a post-processing device to receive data related to the location of said defect and  
to effect a repair; wherein

said differential pressure exceeds said defect bubble point pressure such that when  
said differential pressure is applied across said material web, said liquid is removed from  
one of said defect.

100. The method according to claim 99, wherein said processor is further configured to  
determine at least one of the size and the shape of said defect, and to transmit data related  
to said at least one of said size and said shape to said post-processing device.
101. The method according to claim 99, wherein said post-processing device is configured to  
move into contact with said material web when effecting a repair.
102. The method according to claim 99, wherein said post-processing device is an adhesive  
dispenser, configured to dispense a bead of an adhesive to cover at least a portion of said  
defect.
103. The method according to claim 99, wherein said post-processing is configured to affix a  
piece of a material to said material web to cover said defect.
104. The method according to claim 99, wherein said post-processing device is configured to  
heat a portion of said material web proximate to said defect.